Rules of the Game
Animals (Part Two)
By Skip Williams

Last week, we considered the ins and outs of giving an animal commands during an encounter. As we noted last week, a trained animal must be commanded to perform a trick it knows. This week, we review the tricks the game makes available.

Tricks

The Handle Animal skill description on pages 74 and 75 of the *Player's Handbook* includes a list of tricks. Here's a summary along with some additional commentary:

Attack: The animal attacks your foes on command. Animals can attack your foes when they don't know this trick, but usually only when attacked themselves or when they perform another combat-oriented trick (such as defend).

Usually, you give the command to attack and point to a foe the animal can see or otherwise perceive. If your Handle Animal check succeeds, the animal attacks the designated foe to the best of its ability. The rules don't address this, but you may want to consider simply giving an attack order and allowing the animal to select a foe to attack. Most animals are discerning enough to tell your foes from your allies, especially once a battle starts. See the notes on the down trick for more notes on how animals act in a battle.

According to the rules, animals attack only humanoids, monstrous humanoids, giants, or other animals. Aberrations, constructs, dragons, fey, elementals, magical beasts, plants, oozes, outsiders, undead, and vermin make animals uneasy. You can train an animal to attack creatures of any kind, but doing so counts as two tricks. Remember that you can still "push" an animal not trained to attack any foe to attack a strange creature.

Please note that we're talking about animals attacking on command. An animal fights in its own defense when any kind of creature attacks it. You can also count on an animal that you've trained to defend to stand its ground in the face of nearly any foe. Likewise, be fairly liberal in deciding which creatures animals attack on command. A dog, for example, might well shy away from a Gargantuan monstrous spider, but it probably won't balk at attacking a Small or Tiny one. Likewise, magical beasts such as girallons and owlbears aren't strange enough to make attack animals balk.

Come: A successful check makes the animal move to a space adjacent to you, or it moves into your space if it is small enough to do so (see page 148 in the *Player's Handbook*), even if it isn't inclined to do so.

The animal generally follows the shortest path to you, but it avoids any hazards (including hostile creatures) and impassible terrain along the way if it can. The DM might decide to increase the check difficulty if the animal's only path to you entails some risk (for example, if the animal must walk a narrow ledge and risk a fall if it fails a Balance check, or if it must jump from a dock into a wobbly boat).

You also can use this command to make an animal ignore some distraction, such as another animal, and come to you, but this command won't make the animal break off combat; see the notes on the "down" command.

Down (DC 15): The animal breaks off from combat or otherwise backs down. An animal that doesn't know this trick continues to fight until it must flee (due to injury, a fear effect, or the like) or its opponent is defeated.

Fetch (DC 15): The animal goes and gets something. If you do not point out a specific item, the animal fetches some random object.

Guard (DC 20): The animal stays in place and prevents others from approaching.

Defend: You can give this command to make an animal defend you against a foe that is attacking you. You also can give this command when you face no foes at all; when you do so, this command makes the animal ready to defend you if you are attacked. You also can command the animal to defend another character that you specify.

The rules don't define exactly what the animal does when it receives this command, but it's pretty clear to me that the animal attacks any creature that tries to attack you (or some other character you've designated). I recommend that the animal also remains adjacent to you and moves to place itself between you and hostile creatures.

Once you give this command, the animal continues to defend you (or another character you've designated) until it receives a different command. In effect, the animal fights to defend you just as it fights to defend itself.

As suggested earlier, an animal defending you attacks any sort of creatures when defending you.

An animal acting under this command remains vigilant to the best of its ability. As a living creature, an animal needs to eat and sleep, and eventually it must abandon a task if not relieved. Unless something else interferes or distracts the animal, it normally takes up the task again after seeing to its needs. If in doubt, you can call for another Handle Animal check with a -5 penalty. The character who originally gave the order makes the check even if no longer present.

Down: You give this command to make the animal stop whatever it's currently doing. Usually, you give this command to make an animal stop fighting, but you can make it cease almost any activity. The rules don't say what the animal does when it backs down; I recommend that the animal remain adjacent to its foe (or other object of its attention) or it makes a 5-foot step away from the opponent and toward you. The DM decides if the animal makes the step.

An animal that doesn't know this trick fights until it defeats its foe (or acts until it completes its task) or until an injury or some other condition (such as a fear effect) forces it to flee. The rules don't say how long a wounded animal keeps fighting. An animal usually doesn't fight to the death, and I recommend that it fight until it loses somewhere between half and three quarters of its hit points. The more aggressive the animal, the more punishment it endures before fleeing.

Fetch: The animal picks up something and brings it to you. If you point to a specific item, the animal goes to get

it and then carries or drags it to you. If you fail to point out a specific item, the animal grabs some random object that it can easily pick up and carry and brings that to you. The rules don't say how far the animal travels to retrieve a random item. I suggest that the animal moves to the nearest location that might have something to fetch before searching for something to pick up, but that it's always at least a half move for the creature.

Guard: This works much like the defend command, except that the animal stays in place and keeps other creatures from approaching or entering the area.

What's Next?

We're out of time for this week. Next week, we conclude our look at the tricks an animal can learn, and we explore how animals act when they lack commands.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of **Dragon** *Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual* . When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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